

# Columbia Downtown Focus Group

Minutes from Meeting June 14, 2006

Issued: June 23, 2006

## Review of Focus Group Meeting Minutes from May 24, 2006

- Mary Pivar asked that the minutes be revised to include her comment about other communities that use the density trade-off process to obtain cultural and civic amenities.

## Traffic Study Update

Steve Lafferty introduced the topic by mentioning the Baltimore Examiner article that included a quote from the Columbia Downtown traffic consultant. Marsha McLaughlin stated that the Department's intent was to have the group read the report before the newspaper reported on it. Marsha outlined the status of the traffic study:

- The first draft needed correction for double counting some of the development program and to be sure the report accurately reflects the Downtown road system.
- Consultant was asked to analyze three Critical Lane Volume (CLV) variables:
  - CLV 1450 (current APF Traffic Study requirement with constrained Downtown intersections)
  - CLV 1600 (a somewhat more urban standard)
  - CLV 1800 (a higher urban standard)
- Consultant has been asked to make recommendations for two types of enhanced improvements:
  - Improving South Entrance Road to a full interchange with US 29 and increasing lanes from that interchange into Downtown
  - Widening other roads in Downtown, including Little Patuxent Parkway to MD 175 / US 29
- The County wants to understand how much program can Downtown handle and if the program needs to be reduced, what reductions give us most benefit. Initial advice showed office reduction gives the greatest benefit in P.M. peak hour traffic reduction
- Focus Group meeting to review the traffic study is tentatively scheduled for July 12, with Walter Kulash invited to make the presentation. The traffic study should be available for review two weeks before the meeting.

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

- Did you ask for Traffic Demand Management?  
*DPZ Reply:* No, we did not. Maple Lawn is providing a TDM Plan (including transit). We asked what level of transit might be realistic.
- Office is needed in Downtown. Don't reduce it too low. Look at TDM as an option that could fund and coordinate transit, car pools, etc.  
*DPZ Reply:* We need to understand more how to factor transit and TDM into the process.
- A twenty-five to thirty year time horizon needs to consider more than minimal transit.
- Need to recognize transit rather than plan for a car-based scenario. Thank you for giving us two weeks to study. People do not understand "constrained intersection." They think it means constrain future development.  
*DPZ Reply:* The APF Committee designated Ellicott City and Town Center as constrained due to their urban or historic nature. If we do not constrain intersections, developers would have to mitigate the traffic and make roads wider and less pedestrian friendly. We may also want to have a delay or queuing study done to understand intersection capacity. We will discuss this topic further with Walter Kulash.

## Zoning Draft Regulations

A flow chart was distributed to describe the development review process. Marsha McLaughlin made a PowerPoint presentation (available at <http://www.co.ho.md.us/DPZ/DPZDocs/FocusGroup-Zoning-061406.pdf>) clarifying outstanding issues in the Columbia Downtown Overlay Zoning proposal.

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

- Why can't the County request the zoning change?  
*DPZ Reply:* County law says only an owner can request a zoning change unless it is done as part of a comprehensive County rezoning process.
- Can't we change that law?  
*DPZ Reply:* Such a change would have to be county-wide. County Council members recently brought up the topic of changing the zoning process.
- Will GGP's Downtown Development Plan (DDP) show other people's property, producing a plan that logically shows what happens on adjacent properties (best guess for roads, open space, etc.)?
- What if a required road goes through someone's property that is not in the petition?  
*DPZ Reply:* We expect that GGP will attempt to meet with other owners to understand concerns and encourage collaborating. Marsha McLaughlin noted that the staff subdivision review process occurs within the Planning Board process to address engineering concerns and technical regulations.
- Please explain the flow chart handout (<http://www.co.ho.md.us/DPZ/DPZDocs/NT-FlowChart-061406.pdf>). What is the benefit of fewer public process steps?  
*DPZ Reply:* May get fewer steps, but get much more detail in each step of the new process, especially early in the process. Community has expressed concerns about lack of detail in current process.
- Doesn't the real detail happen too late in the process?  
*DPZ Reply:* Staff will make sure that the DDP is followed during the subdivision process until the public Planning Board review at the SDP stage.
- How will the new SDP be different than old one?  
*DPZ Reply:* Page 6 of the Zoning FAQ describes the SDP components and criteria. The design guidelines will include architecture and streetscape. Those details are not currently required. We need a process to go back to the Zoning Board or the Planning Board to modify the DDP if there are changes over time, since the SDP needs to comply with the DDP.
- Bridget Mugane presented the recommendations of four members of the Focus Group (Bridget, Bob Tennenbaum, Jud Malone and Tim Sosinski) who met as a subcommittee to discuss the zoning proposal. She handed out a position paper (<http://www.co.ho.md.us/DPZ/DPZDocs/FocusGroup-ProposalComprehensiveDDP061406.pdf>). She summarized the main points in the position paper:
  - Concern about requiring a petition for only 200 acres. This could lead to a patchwork of roads, buildings and open space. They suggested that GGP should include all other owners in their deliberations and plans and that petition should make clear who participated but are not part of petition. Other property owners would be required to comply with that plan when they apply later.
  - Bob Tennenbaum distributed a map showing six key outparcels that could impact plan if they were not included. For example: Sears would restrict blocks in two districts and extension of Twin Rivers.
  - Concerned about the logic of the three existing residential developments on Governor Warfield Place. Hope that development of nearby parcels in Warfield Triangle will occur soon to complete this District. What happens along Little Patuxent Parkway, north of the Plaza high-rise, is also important to control the massing of development in Downtown.

*DPZ Reply:* Need to take advantage of opportunities in the market. DDP will have to include appropriate phasing.

- Can DPZ use allocations to guide where development goes and when? A DDP needs to show logical locations for opportunities such as a hotel.
- GGP has done entitlement process elsewhere, but Howard County's is lengthy, extensive, precise and fair. Approval steps allow the County to suggest, require and deny plans to ensure they fit the zoning. GGP will have to address areas of concern shown on Bob Tennenbaum's plan markup. GGP is working on a plan for their property; they have not yet made an attempt to coordinate with other owners, but they will. Not sure yet if the plan will include others, but will look into it.
- The DPZ review process is thorough, but the process seems to be abandoning what the charrette produced. Some points of the charrette plan were unrealistic. Others represent what people want to see. The community feels first day was "the charrette." Much was lost on subsequent days. The proposals did not show up on pedestrian, traffic, and other plans. Affordable housing was negotiated away early on. Social things have been dropped. The mechanical parts are there.  
*DPZ Reply:* Recognize the proposal does not match what some members want it to be. There will be opportunities to comment later. An Affordable Housing Task Force, appointed by the County Executive, will be deliberating further about affordable housing.
- Zoning is crucial to Downtown implementation and this zoning discussion is happening late in the Focus Group process. The Design Guidelines set up the details that developers of a particular property must follow. The Design Guidelines have two loopholes for developers: they allowed changes if the developer can show economic / market constraints or unusual program conditions.  
*DPZ Reply:* To recap, the Zoning Board approval process defines what changes will or will not be allowed.
- The process works. That is evident to anyone who had participated in the process as a developer.
- Vital dense walkable downtown is needed. Concerned that residential development could occur in the Crescent early in the development process. This area is remote from Downtown, so vibrancy and connection to LPP and the Lakefront could be lost.  
*DPZ Reply:* Petitioner is required to do a phasing / staging plan and it will be part of DDP.
- GGP plans to address the issue of connecting the Mall to the Lakefront; it is on the top of their list of things to consider.
- Toby Orenstein is absent, but she has talked about arts. There should be a natural flow of cultural events so someone could go from Toby's to the Rouse Theatre and the Smith Theater, etc. This needs to be on the plan.
- Landowners who do not join a DDP by GGP are not "dissenters" and using this language would be disincentive and negative.
- The GGP plan shouldn't be binding on other owners.
- The Focus Group has a lot of professionals, but everyone should be equal partners and have equal voices. Social values are not in the plan. Need an "arts alley" with arts space on a walkable street. Columbia did not fill the theater for a concert last night at Columbia Festival. We have not decided how urban we will be and we need to.
- The development community agrees about importance of the cultural component and wants to participate in making it happen.
- Mistrust, fear and frustration won't disappear, despite attempts by DPZ to explain.
- Need to understand why things are not feasible. Issues like affordable housing won't disappear until the Focus Group understands why their recommendations can't happen. What will downtown look like in ten years and how will we get there? Not comfortable that the vibrancy will be there.
- Want to have zoning changed to make it legal to have plan for all downtown, it's absolutely necessary. Page four of the zoning FAQ does include phasing / staging so it will be required (maybe GGP can do broad guidelines for other owners).
- We need sub-committee to come up with specifics for social / cultural aspects of the plan. Some of the suggestions to date have been commercial ventures, not community non-commercial facilities. DPZ is talking about the physical plan not the social issues or "soft stuff" that comes later.

## Height and Density from the Charrette

Mina Hilsenrath reviewed a chart that showed the history of height recommendations since October 15, 2005 (available at <http://www.co.ho.md.us/DPZ/DPZDocs/CDMP-HeightHistory-061406.pdf>). The chart has a space for Focus Group recommendations and a space for revised recommendations by DPZ. The discussion about heights will be ongoing and will be influenced by the traffic study. Changes to the development program may come as a result of the traffic information.

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

- At the first Saturday charrette session only 3 groups discussed height and they spoke about 10-12 story buildings. Only one presentation mentioned taller buildings.
- There was no discussion of building height, but we end up with building heights.  
*DPZ Reply:* Day one did not concentrate on height; it was big picture. Monday through Wednesday nights were structured around things the consultant needed feedback on. Heights were part of the feedback discussion.
- Where we go is important, except that there is a trust issue because day one and day three did not connect.
- Need a walkable, livable Downtown. Elsewhere in the world you have livable cities with no high rises, but people live densely (six people in a 700 sq. ft. apartment). In this area our housing sizes are much larger, so to achieve density we build taller buildings. What is the problem with tall buildings? Tall buildings will deliver what we want. Some things won't come first (like a jazz club), they don't come until you have enough people to support them.
- Bob Tennenbaum passed out an article by Mort Hoppenfeld entitled "A Critique of Town Center Options" that discusses this issue (<http://www.co.ho.md.us/DPZ/DPZDocs/MortHoppenfeldArticle061406.pdf>). This needs to be discussed with the public.
- We will get a chance to discuss this all when we see the traffic study, then when GGP does a DDP.
- This focus group should not change heights that came through charrette process. The charrette plan respects diverse attitudes of the many people who attended. Saturday was not about design decisions. It represents consensus even if people do not like the consensus. The Focus Group does not represent general public.
- The Focus Group does not represent all ages, or working people who cannot go to day meetings. Citizens are very involved in quality of life issues, it makes DPZ's job exponentially more difficult. We have to see tangible adjustments to the plan. We have to fine tune the charrette plan.
- Dream what is possible given the traffic study.
- Find a comparable Columbia to a similar sized city and study it (Racine, Madison).

## Schedule

- The next meeting will be on June 28 at The Other Barn in Oakland Mills Village Center.
- The traffic study is now scheduled to be presented at a meeting on Wednesday, July 12 (meeting location has not yet been determined). Walter Kulash of Glatting Jackson has been invited to present the study and answer Focus Group questions. We expect to send the draft traffic study to Focus Group members two weeks before the meeting.

## **Attendees:**

### **Focus Group**

Bobo, Liz (Alan Klein, representing)  
Brown, Maggie  
Coyle, Cynthia  
De Vermeil, Andre  
Godine, Doug  
Gray, Karen  
Hollis, Rob  
Kirsch, Phil  
Laidig, Patricia  
Malone, Jud  
McCord, Nancy  
Mugane, Bridget  
Orenstein, Toby (Harold Orenstein, representing)  
Parrish, Jane  
Pivar, Mary  
Richardson, Lee  
Saleem, Mohammed  
Skalny, Paul  
Sosinsky, Tim  
Talkin, Richard  
Tennenbaum, Robert  
Tousey, Hugh

### **Press**

Blakely, Andrei

### **Council Reps**

Feldmark, Jessica

### **Public**

Broida, Gail  
Broida, Joel  
Brown, Todd  
Chambers, Joann  
Cole, Ray  
England, Brian  
Gallihue, Joel  
Hekimian, Alex  
Johnson, Rebecca  
Ketley, Jeanne  
Kondo, Ursula  
Lapine, Chuck  
Lawson, Marvin A.  
McLaughlin, Jo  
Meskin, Stephen  
Mikkelsen, Lisa  
Rhodehamel, Chick  
Ross, William A., Sr.  
Seiler, Tom  
Sigaty, Mary Kay  
Smith, J.D.  
Templin, Scott  
Toback, Rhoda  
Wengel, Linda

### **DPZ**

McLaughlin, Marsha  
Lafferty, Stephen  
Hilsenrath, Mina  
Blaumanis, Dace  
Clay, Randy  
Mackey, Bill

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